



Friends of the Aranda Bushland Inc

to conserve and rehabilitate the bush

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Convenor's Report 2009/2010

It is my pleasure to present the 19th Annual Report for Friends of Aranda Bushland. It has been a busy year, continuing the work begun in September 1990 by a group of Aranda residents concerned about the effect of cattle grazing in the bush adjacent to the houses. Enormous changes have occurred in the Aranda Bushland since then, and apart from routine maintenance work, most of our energies are now directed towards the Aranda Snow Gums site. About 30 individuals have been actively involved this year and have contributed in excess of 1,600 volunteer hours to the group.

Management

We were pleased to have the opportunity to walk through the area and discuss management issues with Stuart Jeffress and Sally McIntosh in September. It was pouring with rain at the time, but we had waited so long for this meeting that no-one cared about getting wet!

Spring and Wildflower Walks

It was great to receive good spring rain this year, which gave us the best spring flower bloom we have had for several seasons. It also made possible the reintroduction of the Wildflower Walks. We are grateful to Ian Falconer for leading two: one for the general public and one for the Migrant English Class from the Belconnen Community Centre. It was the first time most of the new migrants had set foot in the Canberra Nature Park, and they were delighted to discover our native ground orchids in particular.

Weed Control

A large proportion of our time is given to weed control in the Aranda Bushland, Aranda Snow Gums and the rural lease. The goal we have set ourselves is to prevent weeds staying long enough to set seed. In this way we are slowly reducing the weed seed bank in the soil, and one day, maybe, we will be weed-free!

We are definitely seeing the results of nineteen years' work in the Aranda Bushland. At the Snow Gums site too, improvements are evident. Most of the effort has gone into controlling Paterson's curse in winter and spring and St. John's Wort in summer. Other weeds targeted are serrated tussock, Chilean needle grass, hoary mustard, skeleton weed, thistles, fleabane, capeweed and Verbascum. In the rural lease we are clearing the rose briars and hawthorn and putting them to good use in our erosion control project.

Erosion Control

In 2006 we began a project to try to re-vegetate the slopes of the erosion gullies in the Snow Gums site. We began by laying seed-impregnated weed-matting, a process which has been very successful in NSW. Unfortunately the hot weather at the time, as well as the prolonged drought, meant otherwise for us. The matting did, however, protect the area from the effects of the summer storm, which caused so much havoc elsewhere.

Not to be thwarted, we have received further advice and are now trying an alternative

approach: laying brushwood over the eroded slopes as a means of collecting seed and plant debris and deterring kangaroos from grazing. We are also working to improve the condition of the larger erosion gully, where the walls are nearly vertical and erosion is still active. Here we have laid brushwood along the length at the top of the gully and along surface drainage channels leading into the gully, with a view to preventing the kangaroos from grazing the area, allowing the vegetation to grow and slowing the rate of water flow over the gully walls. This method relies on the results of many years of research by Dr. David Tongway. We are grateful to him for his generous support and advice over the past year.

In addition we successfully applied for a grant from Environment ACT to buy coir logs to place in the floor of the gully. We are intending to create a series of leaky weirs, which will result in small ponds and eventually, we hope, raise the floor level of the gully and re-hydrate the Snow Gums site itself.

Monitoring

The system of step-point monitoring, begun in 2005, continues twice a year and shows how the composition of the Snow Gums site has changed over that period. The data are available in electronic form to members on request.

Rabbits are also monitored. We mark warrens and burrows with ribbon and stakes and map their locations using GPS, ready for Canberra Nature Park staff to control. Pressure of work elsewhere has meant that only the Aranda Bushland rabbits have been gassed so far this season. We sincerely hope the Snow Gums warrens will be dealt with soon. The treated warrens are marked with a red ribbon. Murray has requested that we watch for signs of the burrows being opened up again. Will you also let us know if you see signs of new activity.

Kangaroos are both friend and foe to the bush. While we delight in seeing mobs of roos in the area, we have also noticed the effects of overgrazing. Next year we are planning another kangaroo count and will need your help to carry it out.

Aranda Spine

Recent drainage work in the Spine alerted members to its deterioration. We requested a meeting with the land manager for Parks and Open Spaces, but without success. However, we did have a site meeting with Sally McIntosh, the Parks and Landcare co-ordinator, to look at whether FoAB could initiate some improvements. We letter-boxed all the residents adjacent to the Spine to gauge their response and elicit help, and we have also contacted Greening Australia for help with plants.

Climate Change

We are taking climate change seriously! We have been advised that the best way to prepare for climate change at this stage is to make the area as healthy as possible. This we are doing through feral plant and animal control and monitoring changes.

Tribute to Bill Packard

This year we lost one of our most energetic and beloved members, the legendary Bill Packard. He joined FoAB in 1999, was convenor in 2003-4 and established the tradition of "over-the-top" morning teas. Bill had the ability to see the positive side of every situation and to make one feel good. May his influence persist for a long time!

Thanks

Along with other ParkCare groups, we are indebted to Sally McIntosh, our ParkCare coordinator, for her support and assistance in so many ways. Thank you, Sally! We would like to thank the Canberra Nature Park staff, and Stuart Jeffress and Murray Aston in particular, for their support, advice and provision of resources.

An especially big thank you goes to our committee for their commitment to our cause and their hard work: to Jenny as secretary, Diana as minutes secretary, Peter as treasurer, Wendy as keeper of the diary, Kevin as convenor of the Erosion Sub-committee, Roy for his work on the website and e-mail, Peter for his expert knowledge and advice, Ian and Diana for their

representation on the Conservation Council and Jim for his representation on the Ginninderra Catchment Group.

Mary Falconer, Convenor, January 2010